

Initiatives for the environment

Terry-Ann Pert

DOG MANAGEMENT IN WARRINGAH

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to share ideas on proactive approaches to the problems facing councils in the area of dog control and public education. The enforcement of laws by means of fines for various infringements often results in confrontation. Being able to present workable solutions to everyday problems is a more realistic approach.

The paper will set out ways and means of implementing the initiatives undertaken by Warringah Council over the past four years. Not all strategies will be suitable for all situations, however it will give a guide to the types of options available in urban animal management.

The use of sponsorship has played a major role in the implementation of some of Warringah's initiatives. Sponsorship may be obtained locally or by approaching the major corporate players. Warringah Council has developed its own sponsorship policy which strictly adheres to the guidelines set by the ICAC in New South Wales. It would be advisable to check individual state legislation before seeking sponsorship.

OVERVIEW

Warringah Council covers an area of 142.7 square kilometers and has 1312 hectares of open space under its care and control. With nine beaches and four lagoons, Warringah's environment is a sensitive one. The combination of Warringah's bushland and coastal environment offers a unique lifestyle to residents and is a valuable recreation resource to the Sydney area.

Given this Council's close proximity to beaches and national parks our community generally has a developed awareness of the environment, of the impact of its dogs, through their behaviour, on that environment and additionally of dogs' influence on the social structure within a community.

Warringah Council has taken a holistic strategy for dog management incorporating education, promotion, incentives/ rewards and penalties. Council recognises that the impacts of programs must benefit not only dog owners but those who choose not to have a dog. For this reason Warringah residents recognise the efforts of Council in the area of dog control as proactive and positive. Special attention is given to canine owners in Warringah's annual information pamphlet which is sent to every household.

Council's Animal Welfare and Equestrian Advisory Committee provides direction and is a consultative group forming recommendations for Council approval. The committee has a broad range of community representation so that a balanced view is always achieved.

INITIATIVES

Dog Litter Bins

In March 1993, to combat the problem of dog waste, Council sought and obtained corporate sponsorship from the Exelpet Company to install special dog litter bins in unleashed dog exercise areas. The bins are mounted on a pole which is buried in the ground in concrete. The bins are made of a sun resistant heavy duty plastic with a weather proof lid and have a 50 litre capacity. Each bin is lined with a heavy duty plastic bag.

A key lock spanner is used to unlock the bin. The lid stays attached to the pole and the bin comes away for easy emptying and replacement of the plastic liner before being reattached to the pole. The dog litter is then transported to a putrescible waste depot for disposal.

A local media campaign was undertaken to introduce the bins which have proven to be very successful.

Pooch Patches

The dog litter bins were so successful that in December 1993, again with Exelpet, Council undertook the initiative of installing "Pooch Patches" in parks where children play sport.

A Pooch Patch consists of a telegraph pole standing about one meter out of the ground with a scattering of sand around it and a dog litter bin located nearby. Council's aim is for dog owners to take their dog to the Pooch Patch when entering the park, have the dog do what comes naturally and then clean up by putting the waste in the bin.

This initiative gained Council Australia wide media coverage and has led to over 150 kilograms of waste being collected every week.

Dung Beetles

The Dung Beetle Program was introduced following extensive research and liaison with the Division of Entomology (CSIRO) in Canberra and with Mr John Feehan, an expert in his field. Researchers have found that dog faeces contributes significantly to bacterial faecal coliforms in stormwater during heavy rains. If these levels can be reduced it can only improve the quality and health of waterways.

Three species of beetle were selected because of their preference for dog litter and on 31st October 1995 the first of 40,000 beetles were released in the Curl Curl Lagoon area. The whole release took fourteen days with beetles placed strategically throughout the Council area.

Since 1965 fifty species of dung beetles have been introduced to Australia, initially to cope with the cowpat problem which exists particularly in non-urban areas. Native beetles to Australia were unable to deal with the type of excrement produced by cows.

Dung beetles grow to lengths of between 7-25mm and feed only on excrement. Individual beetles live approximately four weeks and adult females will lay eggs over a three week period. They build their nests under cowpats or dog scats working from under and within the dropping and use a system of tunnels in the ground for breeding and storage of eggs.

When a supply of dung is exhausted, or conditions do not suit, they fly to another source and continue the process. The mechanics of feeding and nest building breaks up the excrement which releases nutrients. As the dung is carried into the tunnels by the adult beetles nutrients are returned to the ground. The tunnels also add to water penetration and aeration of the soil. The beetles bury dung in spring, summer and autumn, are not attracted to light and only fly during the day. They do not bite and their sole function is to bury dung.

The supplier of Council's beetles, Mr John Feehan has been breeding beetles at the CSIRO in Canberra for over 25 years and has initiated a commercial business in the sale of beetles. Mr Feehan has stated "...on rural properties, dung beetles may take two or three years to have an impact on dung burial, however, I believe a good complex of suitable species, can have a significant impact in dog dung burial and have a positive effect on reducing nutrient runoff."

The Dung Beetle Program has received worldwide attention through the media and many Councils in NSW and other states have sought information in relation to Warringah's initiative. Countries such as Canada, Japan, England and South Africa have also been keen to take the idea on board. Further recognition was received in June of this year from the Keep Australia Beautiful Council when Warringah was awarded first place in the Metro Pride Award for the Dung Beetle Program.

Anti-barking Collars

There is nothing worse than a dog which continually barks. It keeps you awake, makes you want to tear your hair out and even if it stops barking you cannot relax because you are waiting for it to start again.

Warringah, like every other Council, receives its share of complaints relating to dogs which bark and annoy neighbours.

At the UAM Conference in Canberra in 1994, the Aboistop Anti-barking Collar was displayed. The manufacturer claimed that the collar would stop 80% of dogs barking and significantly reduce barking in the remaining 20%.

Warringah Council purchased two collars and trailed them on a number of dogs over a one month period. Council had a 100% success rate. Inquiries to the RSPCA told their success rate was over 95% when trailed on their guard and legacy dogs.

The collar consists of a housing attached to a strap which clips around the dog's neck. There is a reservoir into which citronella is injected from a spray can. A battery activates a microphone when the dog barks and a spray of citronella is released under the dog's nose. It is harmless to both the dog and the environment. Most dogs learn very quickly that if they bark they can expect a squirt and so give up.

It was decided to make the collars available for general sale and for rental to residents of Warringah. A fee for rental is charged together with a bond. The rental period is between one and two weeks.

The response has been overwhelming with over 150 collars sold and the fifteen collars available for rental always fully booked. A supply of citronella cans and replacement batteries are kept for sale. As a result of the media coverage Council received inquiries from other Councils both here and overseas wanting to provide the same service for their residents.

Reward a Responsible Owner

Warringah recognises its responsibility to administer the NSW Dog Act and to render penalties for breaches and takes this responsibility seriously with over \$40,000 income collected each year. However, it should be all Councils' responsibility to equally recognise those residents who abide by the law and encourage others to do so. To this end the "Reward a Responsible Owner" program was implemented.

Council's Animal Control Officers patrol Warringah seven days a week and when owners are seen doing the right thing by walking a registered dog on a lead then that person may receive a 'thank you' from the officer and a box of doggy treats for their dog. Should an officer sight a person walking their dog unleashed a free lead is given to take the dog home safely.

Animal Awareness Days

The Animal Awareness Days are the latest initiative of Council. Warringah recognises the value of education and the role it plays in the community. To ensure that every dog owner and potential owner is well informed about the type of dog they have or intend to buy Council, in conjunction with the Royal NSW Canine Council and their registered breed clubs, initiated the awareness days.

The first day was held in November 1995 for owners of Rottweilers. Every owner of a registered dog was sent an invitation and media releases were forwarded for local publicity. The Rottweiler Club of NSW conducted the day giving owners a chance to have their dog assessed by experts, play games, watch obedience demonstrations and take away informative literature. Over 100 Rottweilers and their owners attended and they learned what to expect from their dog and what their dog expected of them. It has also given prospective owners the necessary information for to make an informed decision. As a result of this day Warringah now holds regular Rottweiler obedience classes.

Other awareness days have included, German Shepherds, Australian Cattle Dogs, Australian Kelpies and Border Collies. In light of the success of this initiative regular days covering the most popular breeds will be scheduled.

CONCLUSION

The initiatives which Warringah Council has put in place have been recognised across the country and made it a leader in the area of dog control and education. The extensive local media campaign which has been undertaken has led to a dramatic decrease in dog complaints and a more educated, dog-friendly community in Warringah. The use of unleashed dog areas, dog litter bins and the reduction in the offences against the Dog Act are measurable indicators that the overall strategy employed by this Council has changed community behaviour.

The New South Wales Department of Local Government under the direction of the Minister, Mr Ernie Page, is currently formulating new legislation for a Companion Animal Act which will revise the current Dog Act and include cats and other companion animals. This new legislation will be more in line with community attitudes and expectations and the Green Paper (an initial report) has been circulated widely for community consultation.

With the introduction of the Pet Pep program into New South Wales schools it is hoped that further strides will be made in the overall education of pet owners from an early age. This can only lead to a more tolerant and understanding community who will place a real value on their pet and become more responsible owners.

REFERENCES

Dung Beetles

Mr John Feehan, Soilcam
3 Prell Place Hackett ACT 2600
Telephone: (06) 248 0376

Anti-barking Collars

DLC Australia Pty Limited
17-19 Horne St Hoppers Crossing
Vic 3029, Telephone (03) 9360-9700 Fax (03) 9360 9994
Toll Free 008 333 044

Sponsorship

Exelpet Products
Contact Ms Alex Cronin, International Public Relations
55 Falcon Street, Crows Nest 2065,
Telephone (02) 9968 0999

Animal AwarenessDays

For New South Wales, The Royal NSW Canine Council Ltd
44 Ludenham Road Erskine Park NSW 2759
Telephone (02) 9834 3022 Freecall 1800 451 375

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Terry-Ann Pert was first employed by Uncle Ben's of Australia in 1972 to oversee the organising of the Pal International Dog Shows. In 1974 she was invited to join the New South Wales Royal Agricultural Society's Kennel Control where she was involved in the registration of pedigree dogs and the organisation of the Royal Easter Show for dogs until 1978. From then until her appointment with Warringah Council in 1992, Terry-Ann was involved in a number of businesses particularly in the areas of promotions and marketing.

These skills, in addition to those learned within the dog world, have been utilised at Warringah Council in the implementation of a number of initiatives which are 'firsts' for local government. These initiatives led to Terry-Ann being chosen as the inaugural Animal Control Officer of the Year at the UAM conference held in Melbourne in 1995.

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